

Message Text

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17

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

AID-05 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03

CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 SAM-01 SAJ-01 SAB-01

SCCT-01 ACDA-07 /095 W

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R 091434Z AUG 76

FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8193

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE JERUSALEM 1055

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, ECON, JO, IS

SUBJECT: WEST BANK ANTI-VAT STRIKE CONTINUES, VIOLENCE FLARES

1. SUMMARY: ANTI-"VAT" STRIKE IS CONTINUING IN NORTHERN WEST BANK. BUSINESSES OPERATING IN SOUTHERN TOWNS, BUT INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE OCCURRED IN HEBRON OVER WEEKEND. WEST BANK AND GAZA MAYORS' COMMON POSITION ON VAT REJECTED BY MILGOV. WEST BANK CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE ARE STUDYING EFFECTS OF TAX BUT DECIDED AGAINST RENEWING CALL TO END STRIKE. END SUMMARY.

2. SHOPS IN MAJOR TOWNS IN THE NORTHERN WEST BANK REMAINED CLOSED AUG 6, 7, 8, AND 9 AS THE STRIKE PROTESTING THE IMPOSITION OF THE ADDED VALUE EXCISE WENT THROUGH ITS NINTH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DAY. CONSUL GENERAL VISITED AL BIREH, NABLUS AND JENIN

AUG 7 WHERE ONLY SIDE WALK FRUIT VENDERS WERE DOING BUSINESS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, STRIKE ALSO IN EFFECT IN RAMALLAH AND TULKARM AND PARTIAL STRIKE IN QALQILYA.

3. ARABIC PRESS REPORTS SCORES HAVE BEEN ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF INSTIGATING THE STRIKE. ALSO, FOUR PERSONS WERE REPORTEDLY ARRESTED IN NABLUS FOR HOISTING A PALESTINIAN FLAG DURING A DEMONSTRATION, AND FIVE IN TULKARM FOR THROWING STONES. THE OLD CITY AND PARTS OF THE NEW CITY OF NABLUS WERE PLACED UNDER A CURFEW FROM 11:00 TO 21:30 AUG 8 AFTER DEMONSTRATIONS.

4. WHILE BUSINESSES REMAIN OPEN IN TOWNS IN THE SOUTHERN WEST BANK, SEVERAL VIOLENT INCIDENTS REPORTED IN HEBRON. A BOMB EXPLODED AUG 7 NEAR THE CUSTOMS OFFICE, AND A HANDGRENADE EXPLODED AUG 8 NEAR THE LABOR EXCHANGE. NO INJURIES OR DAMAGE WERE REPORTED. ONE SOLDIER AND TWO PASSENGERS WERE INJURED SLIGHTLY AUG 7 WHEN SHOTS WERE FIRED ON AN ISRAELI BUS NORTH OF HEBRON, ACCORDING TO THE JERUSALEM POST.

5. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE WEST BANK CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE MET AUG 7 IN ERUSALEM AND NAMED A COMMITTEE OF ECONOMISTS FROM BIR ZEIT AND BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITIES TO STUDY THE EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED TAX. THOSE ASSEMBLED CONSIDERED, BUT DECIDED AGAINST RENEWING THEIR CALL FOR AN END TO THE STRIKE, ACCORDING TO AL QUDS.

6. NABLUS'S MAYOR BASSAM SHAKA' TOLD CONSUL GENERAL AUGUST 7 THAT PALESTINIANS CONSIDER THE PROPOSED TAX ILLEGAL AND CERTAIN TO CAUSE FURTHER DETERIORATION IN THE WEST BANK ECONOMY. SHAKA' SAID NABLUS REGION MILGOV HAD REFUSED TO ACCEPT FROM HIM A PROTEST STATEMENT DRAWN UP BY MAYORS WHO MET IN NABLUS AUG 3 (JERUSALEM 1029) BECAUSE, IN MILGOV'S OPINION, MAYORS COULD NOT ACT COLLECTIVELY TO REPRESENT WEST BANK. (STATE TO BE POUCHED.) ACCORDING TO SHAKA' TIME HAD COME TO TAKE FIRM STAND AGAINST GOI EFFORTS TO IMPOSE ISRAELI ECONOMIC SYSTEM ON WEST BANK AND GAZA. HE INDICATED STRIKE CONTINUES BECAUSE PEOPLE FEEL STRONGER WHEN ACTING EN MASSE AND THEY FEAR ISRAELIS WILL CONFISCATE GOODS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IF SHOPS OPEN. THE MAYOR SAID HW WAS NOT IN A POSITION TO GIVE THE GUARANTEES WHICH THE PEOPLE WERE DEMANDING BEFORE OPENING THEIR SHOPS. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATION, DEPUTY MAYOR OF JENIN TOLD CONSUL GENERAL THAT YOUNGER PEOPLE - "BOYS" - WERE STRONGLY ENCOURAGING SHOPS AND VENDORS TO SUSPEND BUSINESS.

7. COMMENT: STRIKE IS A SELF-INFLICTED WOUND WHICH CAN HAVE LITTLE ADVERSE AFFECT ON ISRAEL'S ECONOMY, BUT WHICH HAS

NOW BECOME A SYMBOL OF PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE. BY CONTINUING IT, PALESTINIANS ON THE WEST BANK HOPE TO ATTRACT WORLD ATTENTION TO THEIR PLIGHT AND, IN THEIR OWN WAY, JOIN RANKS WITH PALESTINIANS STRUGGLING IN LEBANON. IMPETUS FOR STRIKE COMES FROM BELOW. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY GREAT PLANNING OR ORGANIZATION OF THE EFFORT. ON THE CONTRARY, THE "LEADERS" FIND THEMSELVES IN AN IMPOSSIBLE POSITION BETWEEN UNYIELDING ISRAELIS AND EMOTIONALLY- CHARGED MASSES. EVEN SHAKA' WHO HAS BECOME FIRST AMONG EQUALS IN THE RANKS OF THE WB MAYORS LOOKS BACK OVER HIS SHOULDER AS HE LEADS TO SEE IF THE REST ARE FOLLOWING. ANY GOODWILL CAREFULLY ACCUMULATED BY ISRAELIS THROUGH CONCESSIONS FOLLOWING APRIL ELECTIONS IS NOW DIS- SIPATED. THE FORECAST FOR THE WEST BANK IS STORMY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WEST BANK, VALUE ADDED TAXES, GENERAL STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976JERUSA01055
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760307-0150
From: JERUSALEM
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760872/aaaacldx.tel
Line Count: 129
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 MAY 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <08 OCT 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WEST BANK ANTI-VAT STRIKE CONTINUES, VIOLENCE FLARES
TAGS: PINS, ECON, JO, IS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006